

AN
ADDRESS
to
The Members of the
METHODIST SOCIETIES

in the

STOCKPORT CIRCUIT:

Containing

SOME REMARKS ON DIFFERENT PAPERS
CIRCULATED AMONGST THEM;

and also

A SHORT EXTRACT

of the

GENERAL RULES

of the

METHODIST-BODY.

BY

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IS THIS
KILMARNOCK
OR 7
NOT
SPECIAL

An Address, &c.

My dear Brethren,

You well know that it is the peculiar privilege and glory of the Methodists to know the truth; and you know also, that it is the peculiar office and duty of your Preachers to declare to you nothing but the truth: and if there was ever a superior obligation laid upon any one more than another to come forward in the discharge of this duty to you, it certainly lies upon me, for the many kindnesses you have shewn to me, since my appointment to labour amongst you. But I am sorry to see the industry of some, who trouble you with inflammatory papers, founded upon untruth, reviling the characters of your Preachers and Stewards, and

calculated to be the laugh of your enemies, and the grief of your friends. I had fully proposed to take no notice of them, remembering what Mr. Wesley once said to me, that, "nothing but good words can hurt us". But considering that bad words may hurt others, both they who use them, if not *sharply rebuked*, and they who hear them, if not better informed by them whose duty it is so to do; and remembering the Apostle's words, "Let not your good be evil spoken of", I have at length thought it a duty which I owe to some, to come forward, in order to wipe off the aspersions thrown upon myself and others.

I have now one of these papers before me, which may be considered as a short specimen of the spirit and tendency of the whole. It is called, "An Appeal to the Methodists in the Stockport Circuit". I shall make my remarks chiefly on what is personal.

1st. These writers begin this subject with observing, "The overbearing and "uncharitable conduct of some of our "leading members, in attempting to "expel from connexion some of their "poorer brethren, for charges frivol- "ous in themselves". Here I must observe, for the information of all, that this is only mere low insinuation ; since no one is able to come forward and produce one instance of the kind, in any part of the circuit, since I came into it.

2nd. They mention, "A partial dis- "tribution of money collected for the "relief of poor members ; the displea- "sure of an individual being sufficient "to render any afflicted object un- "worthy of either pity or relief".---- It is easy to see that this reflection is intended to fall upon our two very worthy Stewards, Messrs. Mayer and Garside, who have the care of the poor's money, and who are two of the

most liberal and generous subscribers to that Charity ; and who, nevertheless, equally submit with others to one general rule, which is, to allow one general sum to the sick poor weekly, with addition to any individual, only in extreme necessity, that necessity being first stated in the Leaders' meeting. Mr. Heald, and myself have examined the Stewards' book, and jointly testify the truth of this.

3rd. The next charge is more pointed, and said, " To contribute more to "the present spirit of dissatisfaction, "than any, or all our other grievances "put together". And as this is the spring of all the mischief, and the chief source of all the dissatisfaction, said to be "in our circuit"; let it be particularly observed, that, "during the "course of the last winter, Mr. Brettell "had the temerity, (notwithstanding "the turbulence of the times), to "preach,---in particular, from, Fear

“ God and honour the King”. If this needs any vindication on my part, I must observe, that, the choice of the text has always been with the Preacher, and he is supposed to have an unlimited right, at all times, to fix upon any part in the Book of God, that he chooses to prefer. But, is it possible that this text should grieve anybody? Or could this sacred precept in the Scriptures any way “contribute to “the dissatisfaction” of any Christian man? Especially in a Methodist congregation, where the doctrine has always been familiar and sacred with them from the beginning. And yet, if this was not the real cause of their grievance, it will be difficult to find another; for if we turn to what these writers say, that I advanced upon the subject, I do most solemnly declare, that not one thing is true, which they have annexed to that subject as mine, in their printed paper. I wrote this

sermon in epitome before I preached it, and the political part at large; and when I read it, the day after, to certain persons, who heard me deliver it in public; they remarked the exactness, and the almost no deviation in expression, in any part of it. This sermon has since been examined by other persons, who heard me deliver it in public, and who now recommend me to present it to the public inspection: which I intend to do in a very short time. But were the enemies of Daniel obliged to confess they could find no fault in him, "except they found it against him concerning the law of his God"? Yes, they were. But alas! for the authors of the "Appeal", I presume they have miserably failed in this.

4th. The next charge that is pointed, is, the notice they take of them, who are said to have cursed my poor insignificant person. They may remember,

that Shemei had done this before with David, a much better person, and he bore it very patiently. And I have only to remark, on this head, that it is to be lamented, that swearing and lying too frequently go together; and although the former of these two is said to be done by the "Carnal", we can hardly consider the latter as being much more spiritual: and yet these are thy reformers, O Israel! who would "Establish their Committees throughout the circuit", and wish to have their "rallying points" in the different societies in the kingdom. But who hath required this at their hands, or delegated them to this service? *Not the People!* they have never called them to this work.

5th. But what is really strange in these New Theological Legislators, who wish to figure away with some "new code of laws"; they claim a sort of relation to the Conference, and

call them, "Honoured Fathers and
"Brethren", and then say, "You were
"honoured with *two* petitions from
"Stockport last Conference". They
should have said, *three* petitions from
Stockport. But hear them go on:
" You begin to be god-like in all your
"doings, for many of your reasons are
"like many of God's ways, they are
"past finding out. We would have
"honoured you, had you regarded us.
" We will never submit to be beaten
"with scorpions." (That is, "to be
"beaten" with a certain Preacher.)
" You are Ministers, not Masters: you
"ought to serve more, and command
"less". So much honour to the "su-
"periority of intellects" in the Con-
ference. From this short specimen of
the abilities of these men, in their
honouring the Conference, it is easy
to suppose how they mean to honour
the Preachers whom they send. How-
ever, this is of small moment to those

.....
who seek not the honour that cometh
of men.

6th. But what is rather curious
through the whole, is, what I deem to
be the vanity of these persons, in assu-
ming to be the friends of the people, by
attempting to remove that Preacher
whom, they say, "had so universally
"lost the love and confidence of the
"people". Happy for them, that it
could hardly be said that the people
knew what they were doing; for out
of fourteen hundred in this circuit, I
believe thirteen hundred never heard
a word of their proceedings, till after
their meeting on "the 22nd of August";
and I am persuaded that half the other
hundred most cordially disapproved
of every thing they did: and I am
equally persuaded, that more than half
the remaining fifty were very doubtful
of the propriety of their measures, under
all the misrepresentations that were
held out, as a stimulation to them.

So private was their meeting “on the “15th day of August”, that I have not yet heard, from any of the people, where it was. It is true, their “meeting “held on Monday the 22nd of August”, was more public, it being held at a public-house in Stockport; but I had no official information of it, till a few hours after, when a certain person (commissioned, I suppose, by them), brought me a string of resolutions, which they had entered into: the purport of these were, 1st, That I should not turn them out of Society: which I had never intended, or even thought of doing before; and I hope they will do nothing to deserve it in future. 2nd, That I should not make the plan for those Local Preachers in future, as it had been my office to do before; and they had certainly a right to withhold their consent if they chose. And as they have said, “WE WILL “BE FREE”, I hope they will allow

others to be equally *free* also, who think it their duty to go on the same way they always have done.

What I think lamentable in this affair is, that they had so worthy a man in their chair: a score of our modern reformers would not have given their proceedings half the credit as this has appeared to do. Mr. L., who called this meeting, and was the chief spring and life of the whole, was no doubt very sensible of this, and therefore availed himself of the honest simplicity of another. But I hope he will be wiser in time to come.

Having observed some of the personal reflections that have been ungenerously cast both upon the Preachers and others; permit me now to give you a short extract of the general Rules of the Methodist-Body, because these are equally blamed in their turn by the same description of men: and this may be the more necessary, because many

of our friends do not sufficiently know them, not giving themselves the trouble to read them, even while they embrace them in form.

1. "There is one only condition previously required of those, who desire admission into our society, a desire to flee from the wrath to come, to be saved from all sin: and it is expected of all who continue therein, that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation, first, by doing no harm, and by avoiding evil, of every kind; secondly, by doing good, of every possible sort, and, as far as possible, to all men".

2. "That this may be the more evident, each Society is divided into smaller companies, called Classes;--- one of whom is stiled the Leader".

3. "It is his business to see each person in his Class once a week, if he possibly can, to enquire how their souls prosper; to advise, reprove, com-

fort, or exhort, as occasion may require: to inform the Minister of any that are sick, or that walk disorderly, and will not be reproved".

4. "Wherever a Society is formed, it is the Preacher's business to appoint a Leader, whose only care is to fix upon a man of the most piety, and the best abilities for that purpose. And if there is a Society already formed, and there are Leaders of this description, he always consults them, when he has occasion to appoint new ones; and never excludes any of these Leaders from the office they bear in the Church, nor any of the members from the Society, but for real offences: and even then, not by his own separate authority, but with the advice of the Leaders, and with the mutual conviction of the entire expediency of it; for, resembling his blessed Master in this, "He hateth putting away."

5. "When any of the Leaders, or

others, who continue steadfast in the things of God, and have clear experience of His goodness, evidence more than common abilities, and have impressions upon their mind that it is their duty to preach the Gospel ; that all things may be done in order, they submit in Christian love the direction of their labours to the Preacher appointed by the Conference to take the general charge of the circuit. But in this, the Travelling Preacher has no authority over the Local Preacher, in commanding any thing, but only in directing his labours, in conjunction with his brethren, by his own consent, for the general harmony of the whole : and when he chooses, either separately or in conjunction with others, to withhold that consent, and to "RESOLVE", as some have lately done, "*That henceforth, the Local Preachers' Plans shall not be made either by Travelling or Local Preachers*"; then the Travel-

ling Preacher is satisfied that he has no more right to do it for those persons, except they alter their minds, and choose to desire him to do it as usual".

6. "The right of appointing the Preachers, and directing their labours, is always acknowledged to be with the Conference. Hence the Trustees delegated from all parts of the kingdom to the Manchester Conference, saw the expediency of uniting in the pacific plan, by joint and mutual agreement, that, "The appointment of Preachers shall remain solely with the Conference; and no Trustee, or number of Trustees, shall expel or exclude from their Chapel or Chapels any Preacher so appointed". And this, I apprehend, was quite necessary, both for the harmony and continuance of itinerancy, which was the wish of the whole".

7. "But it follows, as a warning to the Preachers to take heed, and as a

display of the great liberties of the people, that, "If the majority of the Trustees, or a majority of the Stewards and Leaders of any Society, believe that any Preacher appointed for their circuit is immoral, erroneous in doctrine, deficient in abilities, or that he has broken any of the Rules mentioned" in the pacific plan, "they shall have authority to summon the Preachers of the district, and all the Trustees, Stewards, and Leaders of the circuit, to meet in their Chapel, on a day and hour appointed, (sufficient time being given). The Chairman of the district shall be the President of the Assembly; and every Preacher, Trustee, Steward, and Leader, shall have a single vote, the Chairman possessing also the casting voice. And if the majority of the meeting judge, that the accused Preacher is immoral, erroneous in doctrines, deficient in abilities, or has broken any of the rules

above-mentioned, he shall be considered as removed from that circuit: and the District-committee shall, as soon as possible, appoint another Preacher for that circuit, instead of the Preacher so removed".

There are many other Rules and Regulations, of a smaller kind, and of a less important nature, and very prudential for the good order of Christian society; but those I conceive are all included in the above. To instance some: What man will be "unruly or unthinking", that properly attends to the first? And what Leader or private member will be inclined "to disturb "the people, by circulating letters, "calling meetings, or doing any thing "new", that properly attends to the true nature and spirit of the fourth? And what Local Preacher can wish to act independent of his brethren, and without his usual directions, who rightly weighs the propriety of the fifth?

And what Travelling Preacher will presume, or even dare to act otherwise than by the same Rules, when he considers the nature and force of the last? And I appeal to the reason of every man, if these rules are not founded upon the strongest basis of reason and religion? And I ask any man to shew me, which of these is "*unscriptural*", or which of them bears the marks of "*tyranny*", or "*despotic*" influence, either in their own nature, or in any power they give to one over another of that tendency, to any description of persons amongst us? They are most awfully binding to the Travelling Preachers, while they see, in the last Rule, every Leader in the circuit qualified to sit in judgment upon them; and they ought to be sacredly binding to every other person in the Methodist Community.

But I will ask those now, who have rejected these Rules, and have Re-

olved to be "FREE", where is the wisdom and propriety of your conduct, in disturbing the people of different Societies, by circulating your papers amongst them? They are happy, and *free* from confusion and discord, where your inflammatory letters do not come, or where they only meet with their true merit, and are rejected with proper indignation; which I am happy to find is the general case throughout the circuit, with very few exceptions. And I ask again, Where is your piety, reviling your Ministers? and saying, "The Preachers make themselves absolute governors, and in virtue of that, seize upon all the rights of the people". *Behold, here we are, witness against us before the Lord: Whose have we taken? or whose ass have taken? Whom have we defrauded? whom have we oppressed? Or by what rule could we have done it, if had been so inclined?*

Leaving these reflections with you, I come briefly to discharge a duty I owe to them, who really love their Ministers, and do most cheerfully remember such as have the rule over them. To these I recommend a frequent consideration of the following sacred Scriptures: *My son, fear thou the Lord and the king, and meddle not with them that are given to change. For their calamity shall rise suddenly, and who knoweth the ruin of them both?* Prov. xxiv. 21, 22. *Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them.* Rom. xvi. 17. *And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.* 2 Thess. iii. 14, 15.

To these cautions I will only add, *Let your moderation be known unto all*

men. The Lord is at hand. Be careful for nothing: but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.



Note 1, Page 4.

Let it not be supposed, however, that all the other parts of the Appeal are founded in fact: They assert, that "our Society in Stockport and its Circuit—has suffered a diminution in point of number, especially in the last six months". This is a *gross misrepresentation!* If they had said, some particular places in the Circuit, this would have been true; but it is at those very places where they have been so industriously spreading their opinions! In the other places the Societies have flourished; and taking the whole Circuit, there has been an increase (notwithstanding the steps they have taken to disturb its peace) last year, and especially during the last six months.

Note 2, Page 6.

It is worthy to be remarked, that the poor money is always lodged in a strong Box in the Vestry where the Leaders meet, and no money is ever taken out of it, or given to any poor, but upon the *public representation* of their case in the Leaders' meeting! so that the money never goes into the Stewards' possession: nor is it possible, from these circumstances, that "the displeasure of an *individual* could render any afflicted object *unworthy* of (nor withhold from such an one) either pity or relief"! Let the authors of the Appeal, then, be ashamed of the *vile slander*, calculated to injure the collection for the poor, and to prejudice the minds of the people against men, who have been an *Ornament* to Methodism almost from its *infancy*.

FINIS.



